

Workshop “Vision and Visuality in Buddhism and Beyond”, University of Zürich, November 25, 2016

On the Meaning of *jhāna* and *dhyāna* “Meditation” in
Early Buddhism, the
Mokṣadharmaparvan of the *Mahābhārata* and in
Classical Yoga Philosophy

Philipp A. Maas, University of Leipzig

UNIVERSITÄT LEIPZIG

The structure of this presentation:

1. Introduction: a) The *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* in South Asian intellectual and religious history
b) The philosophical foundations of classical Sāṅkhya-Yoga
2. The meaning of Pali *jhāna* (Sanskrit *dhyāna*) in early Buddhism
3. The meanings of Sanskrit *dhyāna* in the Mokṣadharmaparvan of the *Mahābhārata*
4. The meanings of Sanskrit *dhyāna* in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*

1. Introduction: a) The *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* in South Asian intellectual and religious history
- b) The philosophical foundations of classical Sāṅkhya-Yoga

2. The meaning of Pāli *jhāna* (Sanskrit *dhyāna*) in early Buddhism¹

In the Pali canon, the Buddhist path to salvation is frequently called the “Noble Eightfold Path” (*ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo*). This path is sketched in a series of eight terms, the final one of which is “right absorption” (*sammāsamādhi*). Right absorption consists of four succeeding stages of meditation called *jhāna* (Skt. *dhyāna*). Entering these stages requires as a precondition the annihilation of the five hindrances of (1) longing for objects, (2) aversion, (3) sloth and torpor, (4) excitement and remorse, and (5) excessive doubt. The first stage of *jhāna* meditation is described at several instances as follows:

“Being free from desires and being free from unwholesome dharma-s, he (i.e. the monk on his way to liberation) enters the first *jhāna*, which involves thinking and evaluation, delight and happiness and is generated by separation.”

vivicc’ eva kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi savitakkaṃ savicāraṃ vivekajaṃ pītisukhaṃ paṭhamaṃ jhānaṃ upsampajja viharati (Majjhimanikāya 1.347,12-14).

¹ See Cousins, Lance S. “Buddhist Jhāna: Its Nature and Attainment According to the Pali Sources.” *Religion* 3.2 (1973): 115–31, and Eimer, Helmut. *Buddhistische Begriffsreigen als Skizzen des Erlösungsweges*. Vienna 2006, § 1.3.4, p. 25 ff.

The four *jhāna*-s of early Buddhism

Stages of meditation	Modes of awareness			
	thinking and evaluation	delight	happiness	
1. <i>jhāna</i>	thinking and evaluation	delight	happiness	
2. <i>jhāna</i>		delight	happiness	
3. <i>jhāna</i>			happiness	
4. <i>jhāna</i>				equanimity and mindful- ness (<i>upekhā- sati</i>)

3. The meanings of Sanskrit *dhyāna* in the Mokṣadharmaparvan of the *Mahābhārata*²

Mahābhārata 12.188.1–15 (Bhīṣma addresses Yudhiṣṭhira):

Truly, o King, I shall explain to you the fourfold *dhyāna-yoga*. When the highest Ṛṣis have comprehended it, they attain eternal success. The yogis, the great Ṛṣis, who enjoy comprehension and whose minds are directed towards Nirvāṇa, practice it the way in which it is properly performed. The knower of *dhyāna-yoga*, without disgust, free from afflictions, free from laziness and free from desire, should repeatedly let his mind enter absorption by means of *dhyāna*. Initially, during the first *dhyāna*, while the sage enters absorption, he attains thinking, evaluation and separation.

*hanta vakṣyāmi te pārtha dhyānayogaṃ caturvidham /
yaṃ jñātvā śāśvatīm siddhiṃ gacchanti paramarṣayaḥ // 1*

*yathā svanuṣṭhitam dhyānam tathā kurvanti yoginaḥ /
maharṣayo jñānatṛptā nirvāṇagatamānasāḥ // 2 ...*

*anirvedo gatakleśo gatatandrīr amatsaraḥ /
samādadhyāt punaś ceto dhyānena dhyānayogavit // 14*

*vicāraś ca vitarkaś ca vivekaś copajāyate /
muneḥ samādadhānasya prathamam dhyānam āditaḥ // 15*

² See Bedekar, V. M. “Dhyānayoga in the Mahābhārata.” *Bhāratīya Vidyā* 20–21 (1963): 116–125.

4. The meanings of Sanskrit *dhyāna* in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*³

[Absorption (*samādhi*)] is conscious [of an object], because it involves [awareness] through thinking, evaluation, joy, and in the form of individuality (YS I.17). ‘Thinking’ is the mental capacity’s gross investigation of an object. The subtle investigation is ‘evaluation.’ ‘Joy’ is gladness. Consciousness having a single form is ‘individuality.’ Of these [four], the first absorption, which involves all four [kinds of consciousness content], involves thought. The second, which is devoid of thought, involves evaluation. The third, which is devoid of evaluation, involves joy. The fourth, which is devoid of this [joy], is individuality only. All these absorptions have an object.

vitarkavicārānandāsmītārūpānugamāt samprajñātaḥ (sūtra 1.17).

*vitarkaś cittasyālabhane sthūla ābhogaḥ. sūkṣmo vicāraḥ. ānando hlādaḥ. ekarūpātmikā samvid
asmitā. tatra prathamaś catuṣṭayānugataḥ samādhiḥ savitarkaḥ. dvitīyo vitarkavikalāḥ savicāraḥ.
tṛtīyo vicāravikalāḥ sānandaḥ. caturthas tadvikalo ’smitāmātraḥ. sarva ete sālambanāḥ samādha-
yaḥ (Pātañjalayogaśāstra 1.17)*

³ See Oberhammer, Gerhard. *Strukturen yogischer Meditation. Untersuchungen zur Spiritualität des Yoga*. Wien Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1977, pp. 134–230, and Maas, Philipp A. Maas, Philipp A. “The So-called Yoga of Suppression in the Pātañjala Yogaśāstra.” *Yogic Perception, Meditation and Altered States of Consciousness*. Ed. Eli Franco. Vienna 2009. 263–82.

The four stages of object related absorption (*saṃprajñātasamādhi*) in
Pātañjalayogaśāstra 1.17

Stages of absorption (<i>samādhi</i>)	Modes of awareness			
1.	thinking	evaluation	joy	individuality
2.		evaluation	joy	individuality
3.			joy	individuality
4.				individuality

Conclusions

1. The terms “absorption” (*samādhi*) and “meditation” (*dhyāna*) are in certain contexts in the *Pātañjala-yogaśāstra* (as in early Buddhism) more or less synonym. Example:

PYŚ 1.2. When this very same (mental organ (*citta*)) is free from the defilement of even the slightest quantity of *rajas*, grounded in its own form, aware only of the difference between mind matter (*sattva*) and the subject (*puruṣa*), it attains the **meditation (*dhyāna*) called rain-cloud-of-dharma**. The experts in meditation (*dhyāyin*) call this “perfect knowledge” (*prasaṃkhyāna*).

tad eva rajośāmalāpetam, svarūpapratīṣṭham, sattvapuruṣānyatākhyātimātram, dharmameghadhyānopagaṃ bhavati. tat prasaṃkhyānam ity ācakṣate dhyāyinaḥ (PYŚ 1.2,7-8).

PYŚ 4.29: “The [yogi] who has lost interest even in ‘perfect knowledge’ (*prasaṃkhyāna*), who has realized discrimination in every respect, obtains the **absorption (*samādhi*) called rain-cloud-of-dharma**. When this Brāhmaṇa has lost interest even in ‘perfect knowledge’, he desires for nothing at all. ... Then he obtains the **absorption (*samādhi*) called rain-cloud-of-dharma**.

prasaṃkhyāne 'py akusīdasya sarvathā vivekakhyāter dharmameghaḥ samādhiḥ (YS 4.29). *yadāyaṃ brāhmaṇaḥ prasaṃkhyāne 'py akusīdas tato 'pi na kiṃcit prārthayate. ... tadāsyā dharmamegho nāma samādhir bhavati.* (PYŚ 4.29).

2. In the context of the eight auxiliaries (*aṣṭāṅga*) of Yoga, Patañjali differentiates *dhyāna* and *samādhi* as two different modes of meditation.

PYŚ 2.29: “The eight ancillaries are commitments, obligations, postures, breath control, withdrawing the senses, fixation, meditation and absorption (*sūtra* 2.29).”

yama-niyama-āsana-prāṇāyāma-pratyāhāra-dhāraṇā-dhyāna-samādhayo 'ṣṭāv aṅgāni (sūtra 2.29).

PYŚ 3.2 “Meditation is a single flow of cognitions (*pratyaya*) related to this place (*sūtra* 3.2). Meditation is a single flow, i.e., a uniform stream, of cognition unmixed with other cognitions. Its object is the aspect of what has to be meditated at this place.”

tatra pratyayaikatānatā dhyānam (YS 3.2). tasmin deśe dhyeyāmbanasya pratyayasyaikatānatā sadṛśaḥ pravāhaḥ pratyayāntareṇāparāmrṣṭo dhyānam. 3.2

PYŚ 3.3 “The same [meditation] becomes absorption when it appears merely as the object, as if [the cognition] were void of its own form (*sūtra* 3.3). When the same meditation appears in the form of the object of meditation and becomes void of its own form, which consists of being a cognition, because it takes possession of the nature of the object of meditation, then this meditation is called ‘absorption’.”

tad evārthamātranirbhāsaṃ svarūpaśūnyam iva samādhiḥ (sūtra 3.3). dhyānam eva dhyeyākāranirbhāsaṃ pratyayātmakena svarūpeṇa śūnyam iva yadā bhavati dhyeyasvabhāvāveśāt tadā samādhir ity ucyate. 3.3